

Vietnam Culture Facts: Their Traditions, Beliefs, Symbols And More

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Vietnam has one of the oldest cultures in the world that has undergone several metamorphisms over a span of 4000 years.

There is no denying that the culture of Vietnam has been largely influenced by Chinese culture. However, Vietnam has its own parallel culture that primarily originated from the ancient Nam Viet, the kingdom of the Giao Chi people.

Following the independence of Vietnam from the Chinese in the 10th century, the Vietnamese imperial dynasties started flourishing and there was an evident southward expansion, annexing the territories of the Khmer and Champa civilizations. During the mid-19th century, Vietnam was under French colonization, and it was this time that the country absorbed European influences in terms of architecture and even the Latin alphabet, as opposed to the Chinese characters, which form the basis of the official language of Vietnam.

Vietnamese society comprises both ethnic groups and minority groups with people having various occupations, ranging from rice farming to teaching to business. There are many other ethnic groups that inhabit the highlands of the country. In the central region, the cultures vary considerably but certain shared characteristics are evident. Among these is the affinity towards a way of life that is largely oriented towards small communities and kin groups.

The central highlanders are collectively known as 'montagnards' by the French, which means mountain people. These people have an intense desire to preserve their cultural identities. In the northern uplands, on the other hand, the various groups have ethnolinguistic affiliations with the people of Laos, Thailand, and southern China.

Post-World War II, Vietnamese culture was characterized by cultural exchanges with fellow communist nations, as propagated by the government after the French left the country. Since 1986, Vietnam has continually absorbed influences from the European, American, and Asian cultures. Today, decades after the Vietnam War, Vietnam is a multiethnic country in the true sense of the term. It enjoys several festivals, resulting in many traditional holidays and modern holidays.

Modern Vietnam is struggling with an alarming rise in air pollution. Its two largest cities, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, have been named among Southeast Asia's top 15 polluted cities. That's a rising concern!

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Social Beliefs And Customs In Vietnam

Vietnamese social beliefs and customs are very deep-rooted. The concept of family is very strong.

In Vietnam, the clan is the most important social unit, and it is led by a patriarch. In fact, a family comprising three to four generations living under the same roof is also not an uncommon sight in Vietnam. The clan members are usually related by blood, and they name the villages based on their clan names.

In Vietnam, weddings used to be arranged, and young people were married quite early. However, current [Vietnam](#) is an amalgamation of cultures from different parts of the world, and with the advent of tourism, men and women are now taking their time in choosing their partner, many times, from other cultures and communities. Weddings are, however, held in a traditional manner with elaborate ceremonies and rituals.

Death commemorations of the members are attended by the other clan members and villagers. The funeral ceremony of the Vietnamese people is also quite elaborate. The deceased person's body is thoroughly cleaned and dressed in special clothes, after which people mourn. Burial or cremation is done in the usual manner.

When it comes to greeting, Vietnamese people say 'Xin Chao', which is a form of hello. Traditionally, men and women who are not husband and wife, cannot touch each other's hands. People living in the cities speak very gently and politely, while those in the rural areas, near the South China Sea, tend to speak loudly as the sound of the wind and waves is more noticeable in these areas.

Vietnamese gong (khánh) shaped amulets are considered a lucky symbol in Vietnam. They are associated with wealth and good luck because of the 'bat'. In Mandarin Chinese, the bat is a homophone of happiness.

Etiquette and manners while meeting people as well as visiting the sacred, religious places are very crucial in Vietnam. There are many sacred sites for both Hindu and Buddhist religions, examples are My Son and the Linh Phuoc Pagoda. While visiting religious places, many of which are also popular tourist attractions, one is expected to dress modestly and show respect. One must not speak loudly or make sounds that might distract people who are worshipping and meditating inside the pagodas.

Religion And Philosophy Of Vietnam

The name 'Vietnam' is a combination of the words 'viet' and 'nam' which means 'beyond' and 'south'. While the Vietnamese culture is so enriched, the people of the country boast of having no religion. Vietnamese people worship their ancestors and believe in animism.

A vast majority of people have 'no religion' printed on their IDs. However, the religion in Vietnam has been largely defined by a mix of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, also referred to as 'Tam Giao' meaning triple religion, by the Vietnamese.

Buddhist monks are often found in the Vietnamese pagodas. Present-day Vietnam, both north and south Vietnam, witnesses the practice of Catholicism as well. Because of the ancestor worship of the Vietnamese, most houses have an ancestor altar, which, in a way, emphasizes the unique Vietnamese culture and religious traditions.

There has also been a lot of research and studies on Vietnamese philosophy conducted by present-day Vietnamese scholars. A biographer once stated that the traditional philosophy of the country was 'perennial Sino-Vietnamese philosophy', which basically blended the different strands of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

In fact, the empirical evidence of this blend of cultures is responsible for the phenomenon called 'cultural additivity'. The concept of three-body, heaven, man, and Earth, along with the

agricultural philosophy and the Ying Yang metaphysics, constitute the overall philosophy of Vietnam.

Martial Arts In Vietnam

One art form that is commonly practiced by both ethnic minorities and major ethnic groups is martial arts. Viet Vo Dao or Vovinam is the traditional martial art of Vietnam. The country has a very well-developed tradition of martial arts that has strong similarities with Chinese martial arts. It is the philosophy behind the art that guides the martial arts practiced in the country.

As the art form is closely associated with the three religions, namely Taoism, Buddhism, and [Confucianism](#), it is associated with intense spirituality. The Scissor Kick is a popular movement in this form of martial arts and it takes years to perfect the skill.

Vietnamese Arts And Literature

The history of Vietnamese literature is as enriched as Vietnamese culture. From heavy French influence to romanticism and finally realism, the Vietnamese literature showed steady and gradual evolution.

Two aspects of the literature were folk literature and written literature. The folk literature revolves around the fairy tales and folk legends of places like [Halong Bay](#), as well as humorous stories and epic poems. Written literature, on the other hand, was earlier created in the Cham and Nom characters and today is mostly written in the national language of the country.

Vietnamese art has been influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Silk painting, calligraphy, and water puppetry need special mention, and the Vietnamese people are amazing at these art forms.





Vietnamese Music And Dance

The Vietnamese tradition of dance and music is rich. Vietnamese music, quite strikingly, exhibits diversity in every part of Vietnam. The music of northern Vietnam is formal and classical, while the music of the central region shows a heavy influence of the Champa culture.

The music in the southern part of the country, such as in the populous Ho Chi Minh City, is livelier. Vietnam has nearly 50 national musical instruments. Ca Tru and Imperial Court Music are two of the most important traditional forms of Vietnamese music.

The dance forms are equally varied in this country of great ethnic diversity. The dances are widely performed in the cultural programs and festivals of the country. Some of the traditional forms include the lion dance, the [fan dance](#), the imperial lantern dance, and the platter dance.

As the dances are quite complex, they need great skills and practice to master. Last but not the least, Vietnamese cuisine, which is loved all over the world, needs special mention. Fresh vegetables and fruits comprise an integral part of Vietnamese cuisine.

Popular Vietnamese foods include rice noodles, noodle soup, banh mi, and banh xeo Vietnamese food is also known for its strong flavors, brought forth extremely well by the fish sauce and soy sauce that accompany noodle soups and most of the other foods.

Another unique aspect of the food is that cakes are wrapped in banana or coconut leaves. Seafood is used in abundance in most recipes, and the presentation of Vietnamese food is also something worth appreciating.

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